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What Do Egypt's New Urban Communities Need to Outperform? A Strategic Framework for Equitable Population Redistribution

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ABSTRACT



Low occupancy and persistent dependence on Greater Cairo reveal that Egypt's New Urban Communities (NUCs) cannot fully fulfil their foundational mandate of population redistribution. Grounded in polycentric urban governance theory, this study evaluates the effectiveness, livability, economic autonomy and strategic practice of twenty-two NUCs. Mixed-method analysis combined official statistics, spatial datasets and a questionnaire survey of fifty-four domain experts. Quantitative indicators show that, on average, NUCs have absorbed only 31 % of their planned residents; densities in five cities remain well below the UN-Habitat benchmark of 7,000 inh./km². Expert scores confirm low liveability (mean = 3.26/6) and merely moderate economic independence (3.92/6), while strategic review exposes unrealistic population targets and contradictory datasets across national platforms. Synthesizing these insights, the research formulates a five-phase integrated development strategy: (1) revise NUCA's vision in line with Egypt Vision 2030/2050; (2) establish an up-to-date geo-referenced database; (3) conduct SWOT diagnostics; (4) delineate mutual and unique development areas; (5) implement a realistic, priority-driven strategic plan that mobilises private partnerships and community input. The findings mirror international evidence that new cities risk privileging real-estate speculation over long-term socio-economic sustainability, providing a transferrable framework for corrective action and immediate implementation.

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Highlights:

- Occupancy success is curtailed by fragmented and multi-factor governance structures.
- Livability rating declines with high living costs and unaffordable housing.
- Economic independence 3.92/6 stalls despite large industrial land allocations and housing supply.
- Conflicting population datasets erodes strategic accuracy, lowering effectiveness and expected outcomes.
- Five-phase framework—vision revision, geo-database, SWOT, tailored development, priority action—advances equitable redistribution and robust polycentric governance.

Contribution to the field statement:

By integrating polycentric governance theory with mixed-method measures, this study exposes Egypt's New Urban Communities' 31 per cent occupancy shortfall and quantifies livability and economic independence gaps. It contributes an evidence-based, five-phase strategic framework that recalibrates targets, databases, and public-private participation, offering transferable guidelines for equitable population redistribution and urban performance.

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1. Introduction

Egypt's urban landscape has undergone significant transformation over the past four decades, with the national population nearly tripling to reach 107.2 million by 2025. Approximately 28% of this population is concentrated within the three governorates constituting the Greater Cairo Region (GCR), intensifying the pressure on existing urban infrastructure and resources. In response to these escalating urban challenges—rooted in complex global socio-economic and geopolitical dynamics (Husain & Nafa, 2020)—the Ministry of Housing, Utilities, and Urban Communities (MoHUUC) initiated strategic interventions aimed at reshaping the spatial and structural configuration of Egypt's urban system to support broader development goals.

Established in 1979, the New Urban Communities Authority (NUCA) was mandated to mitigate population congestion in Cairo and the Nile Valley by developing New Urban Communities (NUCs) in underutilized desert areas. These NUCs were envisioned as self-sustaining urban settlements capable of managing their growth independently of older metropolitan centres. This approach aligns with global trends in urban expansion adopted by lower-middle-income countries seeking to manage rapid urbanization, redistribute population, and catalyze economic growth through large-scale, planned developments (Sorensen, 2018). Comparable efforts, such as Morocco's Bouregreg Valley and India's Dholera Special Investment Region, similarly aim to establish new economic poles through strategic investments in infrastructure and urbanization. However, these initiatives often encounter persistent barriers, including insufficient attention to social equity, long-term livability, and sustainable economic generation, beyond real estate speculation (Burger & Meijers, 2012; Aligica & Tarko, 2012).

NUCA has overseen the creation of twenty-two NUCs across three generational waves, with a projected capacity to accommodate 12 million inhabitants and absorb 50% of Egypt's annual population growth. A fourth generation, launched in the early 2000s, is planned to house an additional 30 million people. Despite this ambitious agenda and extensive financial investments, NUCs have recorded average occupancy rates standing at a mere 31% (Kadry & Husain, 2024).

Numerous studies have documented dissatisfaction among NUC residents (Kotby et al., 2021; Elnady, 2024; Kadry & Husain, 2024). Residents have reported concerns related to safety, availability and quality of services, accessibility to public transport, housing affordability, walkability, recreational and green spaces, and access to employment opportunities and social infrastructure (Haseeb, 2017; Abdel Raheem et al., 2020; Kotby et al., 2021; El Sebai, 2023; Kadry & Husain, 2024). These qualitative experiences corroborate the quantitative data and suggest that NUCs have not met their central objective of population redistribution and liveable urban development.

Existing literature has identified various structural and policy-level challenges contributing to this underperformance. These include weak inter-governmental coordination, limited institutional capacity, outdated legislative frameworks, fragmented planning, unrealistic growth targets, and a lack of coherent national urban policy (Nada, 2014; Ahmad, 2015; Salem & Monir, 2017; Haseeb, 2017; Darwish et al., 2019; Mohammed, 2019; Shawkat, 2020; Abdel Raheem et al., 2020; Hegazy, 2021; Kadry & Husain, 2024). In response, a number of reforms have been proposed. These include strengthening urban growth management (Tippie, 1985), promoting decentralization (Soliman & Sharaf El-Din, 1999), enhancing private sector engagement (Amin et al., 2004; Ghalib et al., 2021), prioritizing the regeneration of existing NUCs over the development of new ones (Sims, 2014; Kadry & Husain, 2024), and expanding local economic activities (Yoseph, 2020; Hegazy, 2021).

Nevertheless, the fragmented and siloed nature of these reform attempts suggests a lack of integrated vision. Despite good intentions, they have failed to reverse the stagnation in occupancy rates or improve resident satisfaction. This evidences a critical gap in both theory and practice, highlighting the necessity of a holistic, strategic framework to enhance the socio-economic performance and demographic efficacy of Egypt's NUCs.

To address this gap, the present study adopts the lens of polycentric urban governance theory, which focuses on how decision-making authority is distributed among multiple actors, including

central and local governments, developers, and community stakeholders. This framework is increasingly recognized as vital in assessing the multi-scalar governance structures shaping urban outcomes (Ostrom, 2010; Finka & Kluvánková, 2015). We argue that effective urban development of Egypt's NUCs, as demonstrated in this study, requires a networked governance approach in which overlapping authorities collaborate to deliver integrated services, cultivate social cohesion, and foster sustainable economic autonomy (Ostrom, 2010; Li et al., 2022).

Accordingly, this paper investigates the question: Is the current development strategy for Egypt's New Urban Communities appropriate for achieving population redistribution? The remainder of this article is structured as follows: Section 2 provides a historical background and literature review on the development of NUCs. Section 3 outlines the study's methodology, including variable definitions, data collection, and expert survey design. Section 4 presents the analytical findings. Section 5 concludes by proposing a comprehensive, multi-phase strategy for revitalizing Egypt's NUCs in alignment with principles of integrated urban development and polycentric governance.

2. Background and Literature

2.1. Historical Background

In the 1950s, the Cairo Governorate had a population of 2.8 million, about one-sixth of today's numbers, growing at over 6% annually due to rapid industrial expansion and infrastructure development. However, the 1967 war disrupted this growth, causing economic strain and prompting a mass migration to Cairo, which experienced a 65% population increase from 1950 to 1970. To address overcrowding, the government introduced spatial planning policies in the 1970s to create self-sufficient communities, focusing on affordable housing for low- to medium-income households through the NUCs (Becard, 1985; Sims, 2014).

The main objective of establishing NUCs in Egypt was to stimulate development through various industries and services. For instance, El Obour City sought to decentralize the wholesale agricultural market from Rod El Farag in Cairo, while the 6th of October City concentrated on enhancing tourism and agro-processing. New Noubaria and New Salhia were designed to integrate reclaimed land into the national framework and improve agricultural activities. These communities aim to reduce travel to major cities like Cairo and Alexandria, thus alleviating congestion (Stewart, 1996).

However, the NUCs have not effectively reduced the population density in the Greater Cairo Region (GCR), which includes Cairo, Giza, and Qalyubia and is home to about 28% of Egypt's population. A comparison of the Greater Cairo Region in 1997 and 2022, as shown in Figures 1 and 2, reveals that the region has developed several centers, expanding into the eastern and western deserts. Nevertheless, most new cities have emerged in the eastern desert and often seem incomplete or inadequately organized. Furthermore, despite the growth of these new cities, the population concentration in Cairo remains high. This situation underscores the need for a revised development approach to enhance the appeal of these new cities and promote a more balanced population distribution away from Cairo.

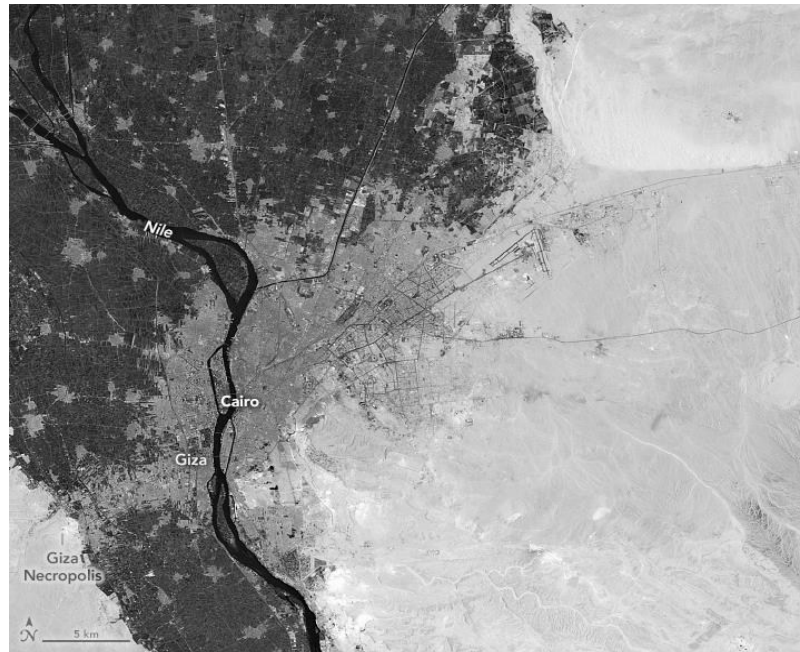


Figure 1. Greater Cairo Region in 1977.

Source: Google Earth, modified by the authors.

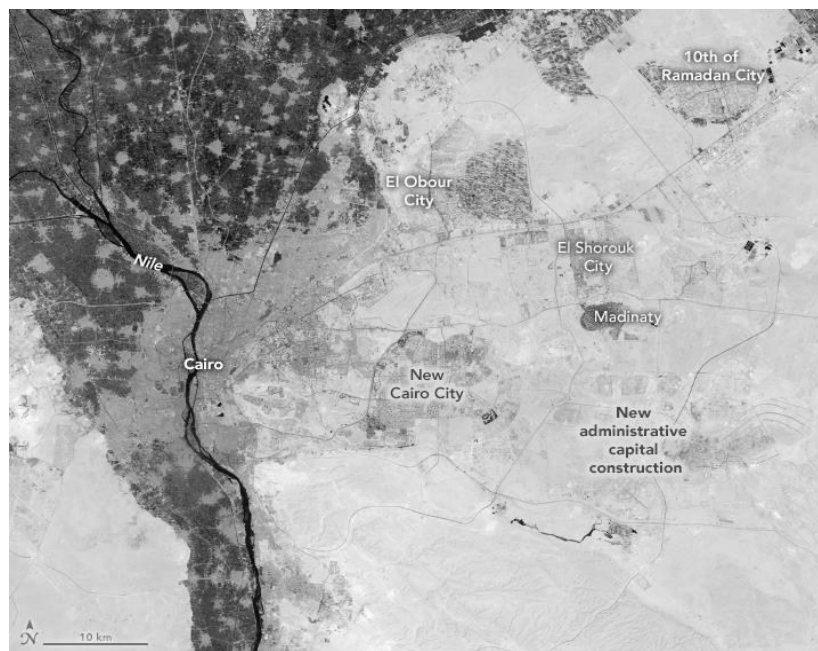


Figure 2. Greater Cairo Region in 2022

Source: Google Earth, modified by the authors.

2.2. Literature Review

The low average occupancy rate of NUCs in Egypt, combined with dissatisfaction among their residents, raises concerns about the effectiveness of these communities in redistributing the population. Two overlapping streams of literature can be identified in this regard. The first stream has focused on various aspects of the NUCs' urban development policies, their attraction and contribution, sustainability, housing affordability, and quality of life. It has highlighted several reasons hindering NUCs' effectiveness and residents' satisfaction. These reasons include weak national coordination, insufficient organizational capacity, outdated legal frameworks, unrealistic and exaggerated growth goals, and fragmented development policies (Nada, 2014; Ahmad, 2015; Salem & Monir, 2017; Haseeb, 2017; Darwish et al., 2019; Mohammed, 2019; Shawkat, 2020; Abdel Raheem et al., 2020; Hegazy, 2021; Kadry & Husain, 2024).

The second stream of literature has focused on making NUCs more appealing to residents to redistribute the overpopulation in Egypt. Suggestions presented in prior studies include developing of NUCs in conjunction with effective growth control and proper planning (Tipple, 1985), promoting decentralization (Soliman & Sharaf El-Din, 1999), encouraging private investor participation (Amin et al., 2004; Ghalib et al., 2021), ensuring better organization alongside effective growth management (Barrada, 2006), prioritizing the enhancement of existing NUCs instead of introducing new ones (Sims, 2014; Kadry & Husain, 2024), launching services and economic activities (Kenawy, 2017; AbouKorin, 2018), and modifying fundamental urban development processes while and implementing socio-spatial strategies (Yoseph, 2020; Hegazy, 2021).

Despite numerous explanations for residents' dissatisfaction with Egypt's NUCs, highlighted by low occupancy rates, a review of previous studies reveals a significant research gap. Although earlier studies have identified several reasons for this dissatisfaction and proposed various solutions to improve occupancy rates, further research is essential to develop a comprehensive strategy for enhancing the effectiveness of NUCs in Egypt. This conclusion is backed by findings from prior studies, which indicate that the lack of a clear long-term integrated urban development strategy has resulted in increased investment in NUCs without optimizing resource use (Darwish et al., 2019; Shehata et al., 2022; Bahgat, 2023).

Thus, drawing on the polycentric urban governance theory, we argue that the fragmented and multi-actor governance structures inherent in NUCs significantly shape their socio-economic outcomes, particularly in fostering genuine livability and economic self-sufficiency. From the perspective of polycentric urban governance, the effectiveness of NUCs is not solely determined by central planning; it also depends on the coherence and coordination among diverse governing actors. Livability, in this context, arises from how effectively these fragmented authorities can provide integrated services and create a sense of community, rather than being merely a result of top-down design. Economic independence is influenced by the extent to which local economic development is supported by various actors, not just through state investment. Ultimately, the strategic approach to urban development within NUCs reflects the complex interplay of power dynamics and decision-making across these multiple centers (Ostrom, 2010; Li et al., 2022). Therefore, this study addresses the following research question: Is the current NUC's development strategy appropriate for population redistribution in Egypt?

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Variable Measurements

Four key variables—effectiveness, livability, economic independence, and strategic practices—were used to assess the success of NUCs in Egypt and develop an effective integrated urban development strategy.

Effectiveness refers to the NUCs' ability to redistribute the population away from the Greater Cairo Region and the Nile Valley. Livability pertains to the availability of facilities and services that impact residents' quality of life (Shamsuddin et al., 2012; Chiu, 2019; Kotby et al., 2021; Sanni-Anibire & Adenle, 2022; Koçak Güngör & Terzi, 2024). Economic independence reflects the NUCs' capacity to operate and develop autonomously without relying on nearby major cities. Lastly, strategic practices involve strategic planning and goal-setting within the NUCs (ElShamy & Nadim, 2020; Shehata et al., 2022).

Each of the previously discussed variables is measured as follows: The effectiveness of the NUCs is assessed by occupancy rates, population concentration in the Greater Cairo Region, and the achievement of the NUCs' mandate objectives (Nada, 2014; Salem & Monir, 2017; Kadry & Husain, 2024). According to Kadry and Husain (2024), livability is evaluated based on adequate maintenance operations, sufficient green and recreational spaces, affordable living costs, reasonable housing prices, appropriate public transportation, and adequate security and safety measures. The economic independence of the NUCs is evaluated by the availability of healthcare services,

educational resources, housing units, job opportunities, essential goods and services, and investment opportunities (Kenawy, 2017; Salem & Monir, 2017; ElShamy & Nadim, 2020; Shehata et al., 2022; Kadry & Husain, 2024). Finally, strategic practices are examined by focusing on the strategic vision and priorities that guide decision-making, ensuring data accuracy (Abdel-Kader & Ettouney, 2013; Elsisy et al., 2019; Nadim, 2022), setting realistic goals (El Menchawy, 2008; Ahmad, 2015; Aboelnaga, 2017), and considering city expansion (Moller, 1998; Barrada, 2006; Ellahham, 2014).

3.2. Data Collection and Sampling

This research utilized secondary and primary data sources. Secondary data were collected from various published sources, including the NUCA website, the Citypopulation.ed website, the City Development Authority (CDA), the Egyptian General Surveying Authority (EGSA), the General Authority for Topographic Maps, and the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS).

Primary data was gathered by designing a questionnaire to assess the opinions of professional experts in the NUCs in Egypt, including professors, architects, urban planners, affiliates of the New Urban Communities Authority (NUCA), consultants, practitioners, and master's and Ph.D. researchers) using a six-point Likert-type scale (where 1 = Strongly Disagree; 6 = Strongly Agree).

Given the widespread geographical distribution of the NUCs and the professional experts, it was challenging to reach all cities across the three generations and engage with all the experts. Therefore, a questionnaire was created using Microsoft Forms and distributed online in October 2022, targeting professional groups and societies specializing in NUCs in Egypt. The response period was open for one month, resulting in 60 questionnaires being collected, with 54 valid responses for analysis.

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program is utilized to conduct quantitative analysis. The variance of responses from each respondent did not show any zero values, with a minimum of 3.3, indicating no signs of a straight-liner problem in the datasets (i.e., the same answer for all questions from the same respondent). Furthermore, the one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test did not show significant differences among the respondents' answers across various demographic variables (the F-test was not significant in any case, as $p > 0.05$). Additionally, the validity and reliability of the questionnaire were confirmed, with Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.70$ for each scale, and the Pearson correlation coefficients between each scale and its items were significant ($p < 0.01$).

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the professional experts' sample. The gender distribution among the experts is 68.5% male and 31.5% female. The largest percentage of experts (27.8%) falls into the 40<50 years old category. Approximately 70.4% of the respondents have at least ten years of experience. Furthermore, the areas of expertise among the respondents are diverse, covering fourteen disciplines. For instance, nearly 33.3% of the respondents are professors of architecture and urban design at various universities in Egypt. In addition, 57.4% of the experts have participated in NUCs projects, with 32.3% having done so for over ten years. Moreover, 64.8% of the experts currently work or reside in NUCs, while 31.4% have worked or lived there for more than ten years. The NUCs where experts reported working or living include New Cairo (62.9%), 6th of October (11.4%), El Obour (8.6%), Sheikh Zayed (8.6%), El Shorouk (5.7%), and New Assuit (2.9%).

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Professional Experts Sample.

	N	Percent
Gender		
Male	37	68.5%
Female	17	31.5%
Age		
<30	14	25.9%
30<40	8	14.8%
40<50	15	27.8%
50<60	10	18.5%



>60	7	13%
Years of Experience		
<5	10	18.5%
5<10	6	11.1%
10<15	4	7.4%
15<20	6	11.1%
20<25	9	16.7%
>25	19	35.2%
Area of Experience		
Architect	9	16.7%
Urban Planner	4	7.4%
NUCA Affiliate	1	1.9%
Professor	18	33.3%
Practitioner	1	1.9%
Consultant	2	3.7%
Teaching Assistant	6	11.1%
Master's Degree	2	3.7%
Ph.D. Degree	5	9.3%
Designer	2	3.7%
Architect & Urban Planner	1	1.9%
Public Administration	1	1.9%
Businessman	1	1.9%
Professor & Urban Planner	1	1.9%
Participating in NUCs' Projects		
Yes	31	57.4%
No	23	42.6%
Years of Participation in NUCs' Projects		
<1	4	12.9%
1<3	9	29.0%
3<6	4	12.9%
6<10	4	12.9%
>10	10	32.3%
Working or living in NUCs		
Yes	35	64.8%
No	19	35.2%
Years of Working or Living in NUCs		
<1	2	5.7%
1<3	7	20%
3<6	7	20%
6<10	8	22.9%
>10	11	31.4%
Experts working or living in NUCs		
6 th of October	4	11.4%
El Obour	3	8.6%
El Sheikh Zayed	3	8.6%
El Shorouk	2	5.7%
New Cairo	22	62.9%
New Assuit	1	2.9%
Experts working or living in NUCs Generations		
1 st Generation	7	20%
2 nd Generation	5	14.3%
3 rd Generation	23	65.7%

Source: Developed by the authors.

4. Analysis and Results

4.1. NUCs' Effectiveness

Firstly, the study assessed the effectiveness of NUCs in redistributing the population by examining occupancy rates for each generation, evaluating the professional experts' opinions on NUCs' objectives, and analyzing population concentration in the Greater Cairo Region. The occupancy rate for the three generations of NUCs was calculated using published data from the NUCA Arabic website. This calculation involved dividing the actual population by the target population, and the results are presented in Figure 3.

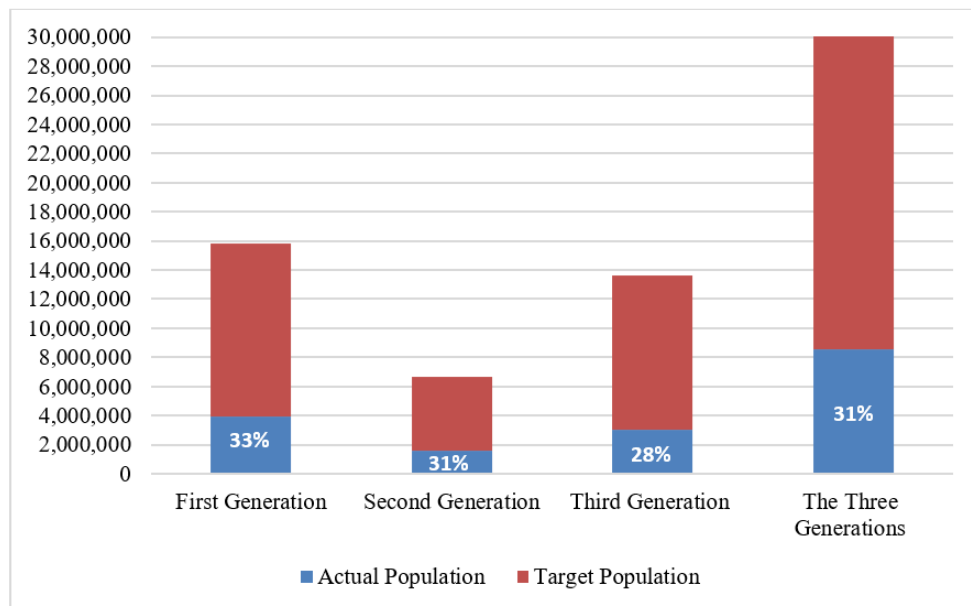


Figure 3. Occupancy Rate for the Three NUCs' Generations, Egypt

Source: Calculated by the authors from the NUCA Arabic website data.

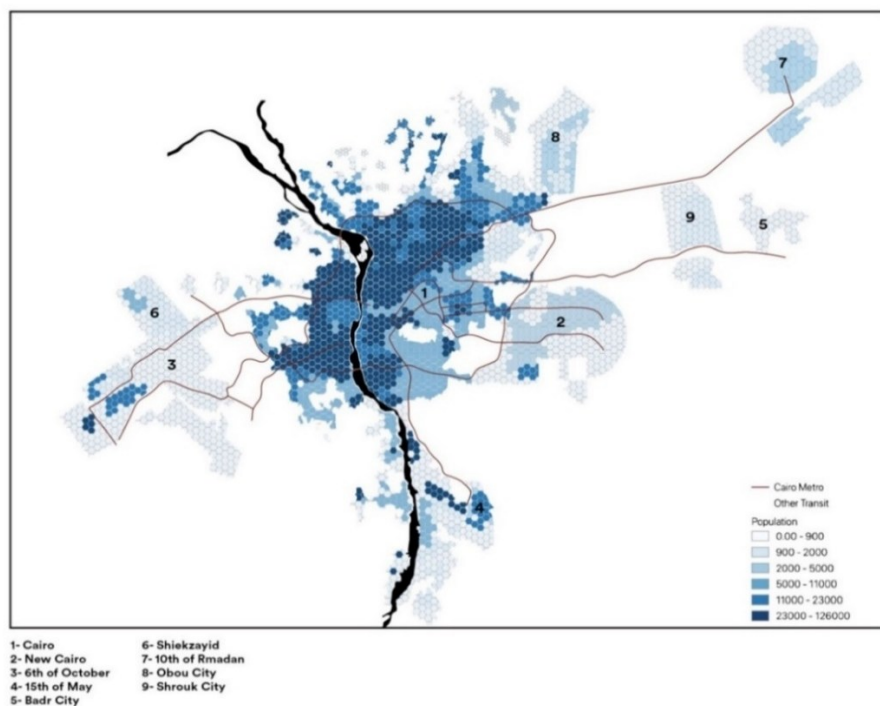
The analysis revealed that the combined population of the three generations of NUCs is 8,543,000, while the target population stands at 27,489,500, indicating that only 31% of the target has been met. Additionally, the average actual-to-target population ratio decreases as we move from the first generation to the third generation, with the percentages being 33%, 31%, and 28%. Notably, if New Cairo City were excluded from the third-generation cities, the rate of decline would be even more significant.

Secondly, professional experts evaluated the effectiveness of the five objectives of the NUCs in Egypt, based on Articles 1 and 2 of Law No. 59/1979, as amended by Article 1 of Law No. 1/2018. The assessment utilized a six-point Likert scale, where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Slightly Disagree, 4 = Slightly Agree, 5 = Agree, and 6 = Strongly Agree. The results are presented in Table 2, which indicates that the experts slightly agree that the NUCs are meeting their objectives, with an average score of 3.98. However, the goals of reducing urban sprawl on agricultural land and redistributing the population away from the Nile Valley received the lowest ratings, with scores of 3.48 and 3.70.

Table 2: Professional Expert's Evaluation of the NUCs' Objectives.

Objectives of Establishing NUCs in Egypt	Average Score
Reducing the urban sprawl on agricultural land	3.48
Redistributing the population away from the narrow strip of the Nile Valley	3.70
Creating new civilized centers that achieved social stability and economic prosperity	3.83
Establishing new attractions outside the scope of the existing cities and villages	4.31
Contributing to extending the urban axes to the desert and remote areas	4.61
Total Average Score	3.98

Finally, the evaluation of population concentration focused on the eight NUCs surrounding the Greater Cairo Region: New Cairo, 6th of October, 15th of May, Badr, Sheikh Zayed, El Obour, 10th of Ramadan, and El Shorouk. The total actual population in these cities is 7,209,950, representing 84.5% of the existing population across all Egyptian NUCs. In contrast, the target population for these communities is 19,204,500, which accounts for 65% of the overall target population. This results in an actual-to-target ratio of 69.8%. Population distribution in the Greater Cairo Region is illustrated in Figure 4, where the darkest areas indicate the highest population density. Figure 4 shows that population concentration decreases as one moves from the center of Cairo to the NUCs. According to the distribution data presented in Figure 5, the eight NUCs have not yet achieved 60% of their population targets, even after an average of 35 years since their establishment. Meeting these targets is crucial for alleviating pressure on the city.


Figure 4. Population Distribution in the GCR and the Surrounding NUCs

Source: Developed by the authors from Kalila & Mahfouz (2019).

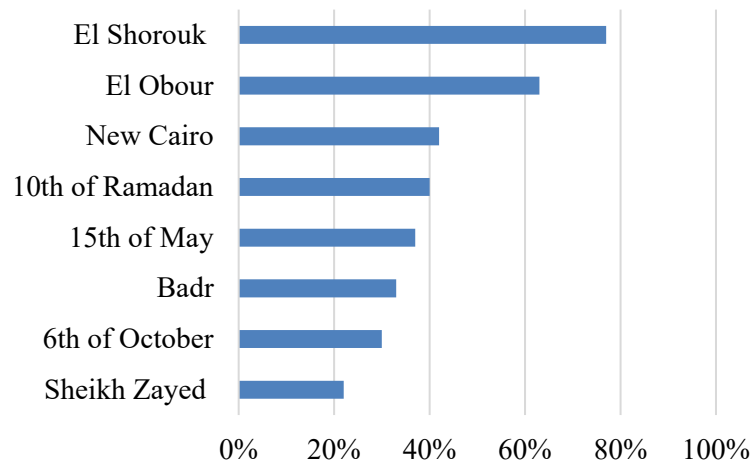


Figure 5. Percentage Achieved of Target Population in the NUCs Surrounding GCR

Source: Developed by the authors from the NUCA Arabic website.

Furthermore, the current population densities in five of the eight NUCs fall significantly below the UN-Habitat standard of 7,200 inhabitants per square kilometer for lower-middle-income countries, as illustrated in Figure 6. This indicates that a significant portion of Cairo's residents continue to live within the city itself.

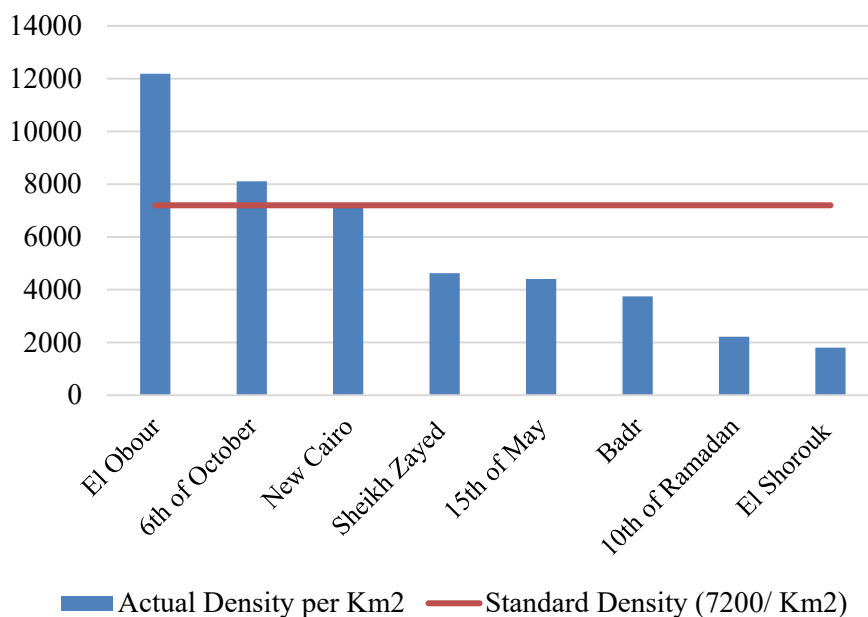


Figure 6. Population Density for the NUCs Surrounding GCR

Source: Developed by the authors from the NUCA Arabic website.

In conclusion, the low average occupancy rate of NUCs across various generations, moderate success in achieving their objectives, and the high population concentration in the Greater Cairo Region indicate that NUCs are ineffective at attracting and satisfying residents. As a result, they struggle to effectively redistribute the population throughout Egypt.

4.2. NUCs' Livability.

Table 3 assesses the livability of NUCs using seven indicators from the perspective of professional experts. According to these experts, the overall livability of NUCs is considered low, with a total average score of 3.26. Furthermore, the factors needing the most improvement are the cost of living,

affordable housing, and adequate public transportation, which received the lowest ratings from the experts.

Table 3: Professional Experts' Assessment of NUCs' Livability.

Indicators	Average Score
Lower cost of living	2.22
Affordable house prices	2.67
Appropriate public transportation	2.94
Adequate maintenance operations	3.48
Sufficient security and safety	3.54
Sufficient green and recreational spaces	3.69
Better living place	4.31
Total Average Score	3.26

4.3. NUCs' Economic Independence.

Table 4 evaluates the economic independence of NUCs using six indicators based on expert opinions. According to professional experts, the overall economic independence of NUCs is deemed moderate, with an average score of 3.92. The areas identified needing the most improvement are access to adequate healthcare services, the sufficiency of essential daily needs and wants, and the availability of sufficient job opportunities, which received the lowest ratings from the experts. The primary conclusion drawn from the experts' evaluation is that the economic development of NUCs still depends heavily on the nearby major cities.

Table 4. Professional Experts' Assessment of NUCs' Economic Independence.

Indicators	Experts
Adequate healthcare services	3.41
Available needs and wants	3.44
Sufficient job opportunities	3.52
Sufficient educational services	4.11
Available housing units	4.28
Available investment opportunities.	4.80
Total Average Score	3.92

4.4. NUCs' Strategic Practices.

The effectiveness of NUCs' strategic practices in redistributing the population in Egypt is evaluated based on their strategic vision and priorities, data accuracy, the realism of their goals, and decisions regarding city locations.

4.4.1. Strategic Vision and Priorities.

The strategic vision of the NUCA, according to its Arabic website, states "to achieve many of the social and economic goals called for by the revolutions of January 2011 and June 2013 to achieve social justice and ensure a decent life for all citizens by providing urban and residential communities with integrated services that include housing units suitable for all segments of society and their facilities, in addition to educational, health, cultural, and recreational services. The NUCA pays great attention to developing radical solutions to the problem of unsafe slums and unplanned areas and integrates them with urban and planned areas in Egyptian cities. Its programs and projects aim to increase the sector's contribution to gross domestic product growth and create hundreds of thousands of direct and indirect job opportunities."

While the strategic vision of the NUCA acknowledges many contemporary changes in both the national and international environments, it still requires further development. For instance, key components of Egypt's Vision 2030 and 2050 - emphasizing justice and social integration, such as

sustainability and the creation of a competitive, balanced, diversified, and knowledge-based economy - should be included in the NUCA's strategic vision. Additionally, the strategic priorities that outline goals, plans, and policies need to be clearly defined in the current vision of the NUCA. The short timeframe between generations suggests that a lack of prioritization may result in unrealistic goals, making it challenging to evaluate past experiences, address flaws, and develop effective learning strategies for future generations of the NUCA.

4.4.2. Data Accuracy.

Obtaining updated and accurate data about the NUCs can be challenging, as published figures vary significantly among different sources. For example, as shown in Table 5, the latest population estimates for 2023 for the 10th of Ramadan City differ widely across three websites: the Citypopulation.de website reports a population of 226,000. In contrast, the NUCA Arabic website claims the population is 850,000. The NUCA English website lists the population as 650,000. A similar discrepancy is noted for the 6th of October City, where reported populations are 355,000, 1,800,000, and 1,500,000, respectively.

Table 5: Actual Number of Inhabitants in NUCs from Different Sources.

G	N	NUCs	Citypopula	NUCA	NUCA	Coefficient
			tion.de	Arabic	English	
			website	website	website	of variation
1 st	1	10 th of Ramadan	226000	850000	650000	13%
	2	15 th of May	32000	335000	250000	15%
	3	El Sadat	66000	470000	300000	22%
	4	6 th of October	355000	1800000	1500000	9%
	5	New Bourg El Arab	44000	177000	150000	8%
	6	New Damietta	51000	245000	150000	24%
	7	New Salhia	54000	42000	42000	0%
2 nd	8	Badr	32000	280000	160000	27%
	9	El Obour	133000	661600	550000	9%
	10	New Minya	15500	77000	45000	26%
	11	New Noubaria	20300	35000	35000	0%
	12	New Beni Suef	29000	150000	75000	33%
	13	Sheikh Zayed	92000	398000	330000	9%
3 rd	14	El Shorouk	90000	385350	170000	39%
	15	New Aswan	102	6000	6000	0%
	16	New Cairo	302000	2500000	1500000	25%
	17	New Assuit	8600	60000	30000	33%
	18	New Sohag	185	8000	8342	2%
	19	New Quena	1600	3000	NA	0%
	20	New Fayoum	418	3500	NA	0%
	21	New Akhmim	0	200	NA	0%
	22	Thebes	19000	47500	21000	39%

Source: Developed by the authors.

Furthermore, the targets achieved by NUCs published on the Arabic version of the NUCA website differ significantly from those on the English version. As shown in Figure 7, the percentage of targets met varies considerably between the two sites. For instance, El Shorouk reports that it has reached 77% of its target population on the Arabic website, while the English website states that it has only achieved 34%.

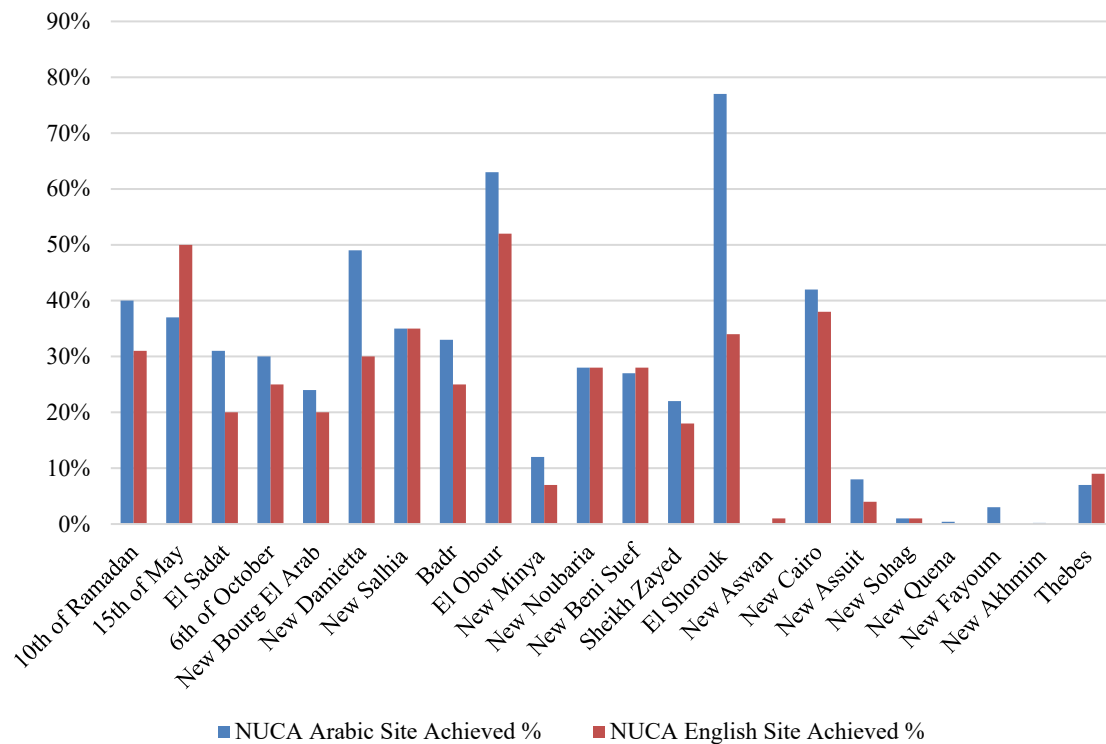


Figure 7. NUCs' Achieved Targets according to the NUCA Websites.

Source: Developed by the authors from the NUCA websites.

Similarly, New Damietta has achieved 49% of its target population on the Arabic site, in contrast to 30% on the English site. Additionally, the English version of the NUCA website does not provide data on the actual and target populations for several NUCs, including New Aswan, New Fayoum, and New Akhmim.

4.4.3. Goals' Realism.

The feasibility of the NUCs' goals was assessed by analyzing the actual and target population per housing unit, the density per square kilometer, and the years needed to reach the target population. Due to inconsistencies in previously published data on NUCs, the official data available in Arabic from the NUCA was used for the subsequent analyses. Figure 8 contrasts the actual and target population per housing unit in the NUCs with the average number of family members per housing unit. In Egypt, the average number of family members is five; however, the actual number of citizens per housing unit often does not align with this average. For instance, El Shorouk has an actual population of 14.8 citizens per housing unit, while the 6th of October has 8.7. In contrast, New Akhmim, New Fayoum, New Quena, and New Aswan report fewer than one member per housing unit. The situation becomes even more perplexing when the target population per housing unit is compared to the average family size. According to Figure 8, the targeted population per housing unit ranges from 5.3 in New Damietta to 115.4 in New Quena.

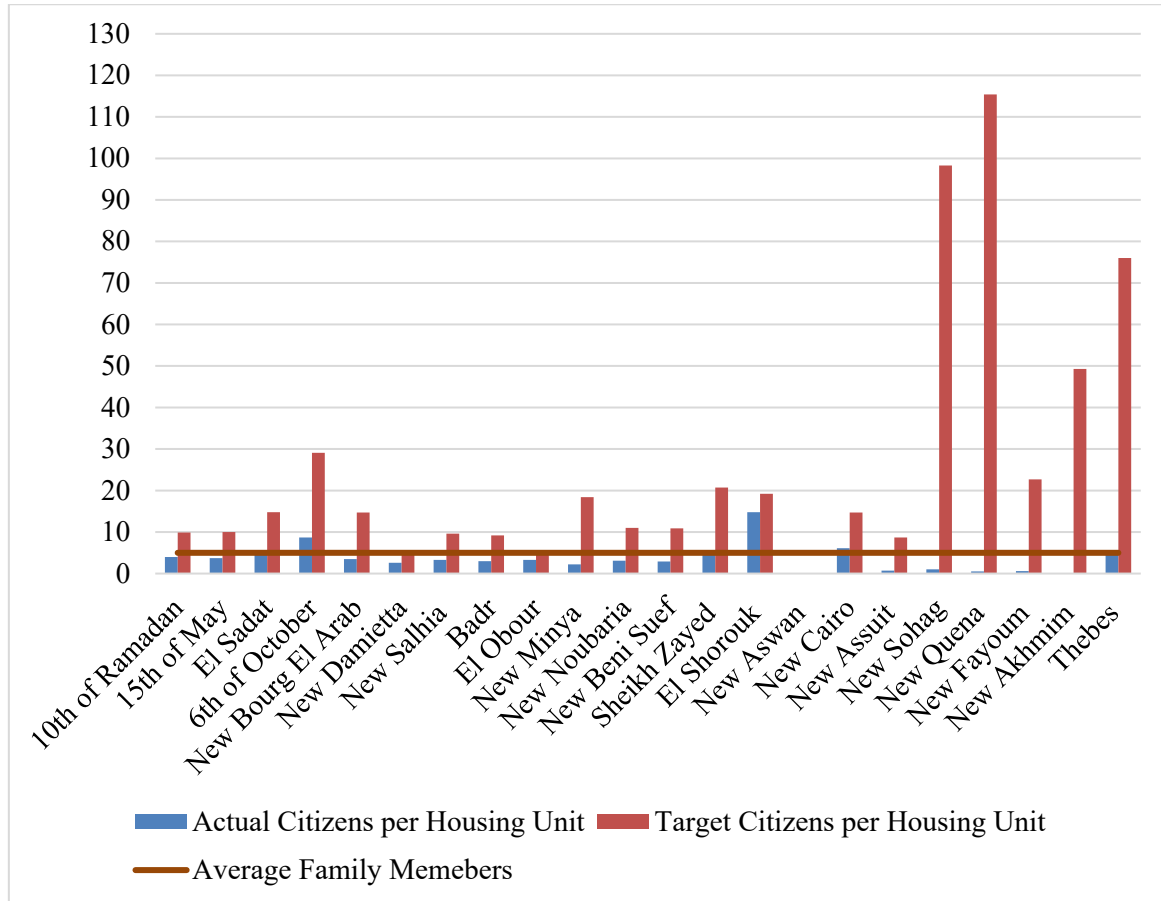


Figure 8. The NUCs' Actual and Target Citizens per Housing Unit Compared to Average Family Members.

Source: Developed by the authors.

Additionally, the actual and target population density per square kilometer for the NUCs was compared to UN-Habitat's recommended density of 7,200 citizens per square kilometer for lower-middle-income countries. As shown in Figure 9, most NUCs fall below this threshold, suggesting that these communities are less attractive. This contradicts the strategy of increasing the number of housing units and expanding construction in NUCs.

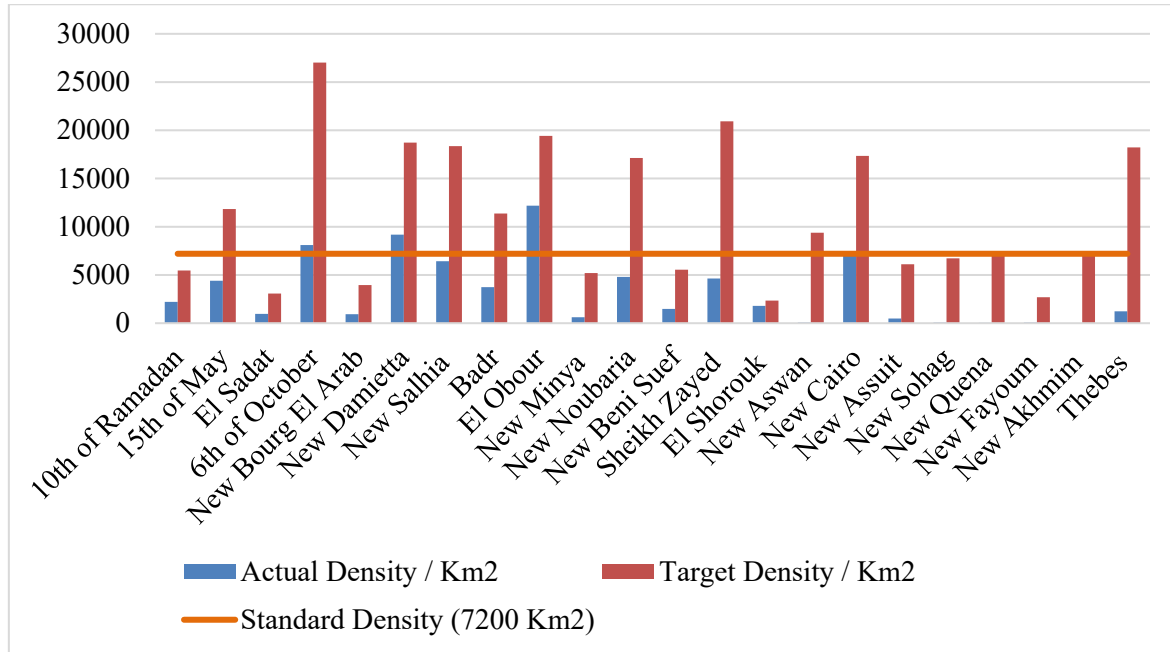


Figure 9. The NUCs' Actual and Target Density Compared to Standard per Km².

Source: Developed by the authors.

Thus, the goals and targets set for the NUCs seem to be unrealistic and unattainable. For example, if the target population for the NUCs were to be achieved, it would likely lead to the same issues of high population density that are already problematic around Cairo. This scenario would require the establishment of additional NUCs to address the resulting challenges, contradicting the original objective of developing these communities.

Moreover, the Greater Cairo Region includes eight NUCs; these eight NUCs encompass two in the western desert (6th of October and Sheik Zayed), five in the eastern desert (10th of Ramadan, El Shorouk, El Obour, Badr, and New Cairo), and one in the southern suburb of Helwan (15th of May). The borders of these NUCs were initially determined under Law 59/1979, which established the NUCA. The lack of accurate data on NUCs and realistic goals has led to inadequately informed strategic decisions. This is evident in the expansions occurring in the NUCs surrounding the Greater Cairo Region, as illustrated in Figure 10. The figure depicts the current development status of the eight NUCs in this area, with their borders expected to be completed by 2030. However, many cities still have significant progress to make. For example, cities like 10th of Ramadan and New Cairo have only occupied about half of their allocated borders. Additionally, the 6th of October area had increased by at least seven times over its original surface area. Other cities have expanded their borders two to three times since their inception, but have not yet fully developed their initial areas. In conclusion, the vast scale of these cities also presents challenges in determining their optimal size and managing resource depletion. This aligns with what the professional experts reported when asked to assess the relevance of the location planning for the NUCs. The experts showed slight agreement that the locations of the NUCs significantly contribute to their goals, giving an average score of 3.83.



Figure 10. Borders of the Eight NUCs Surrounding the Greater Cairo Region

Source: Developed by the authors from Kalila & Mahfouz (2019).

5. The Proposed Integrated Development Strategy

Based on the above results, the current study proposes an integrated strategy for developing existing or potential NUCs in the subsequent section. As shown in Figure 11, this strategy employs a cohesive approach that incorporates feedback and learning from all components and phases.

5.1. Revising the NUCs' Vision

The proposed strategy starts by revising the vision and goals of the NUCs to align with Egypt's visions for 2030 and 2050. The revised vision could be: "To create sustainable, independent, and knowledge-based cities that promote justice, social integration, and community participation within a balanced ecosystem." The Ministry of Housing, Utilities, and Urban Communities (MoHUUC), along with NUCA, will oversee this revision.

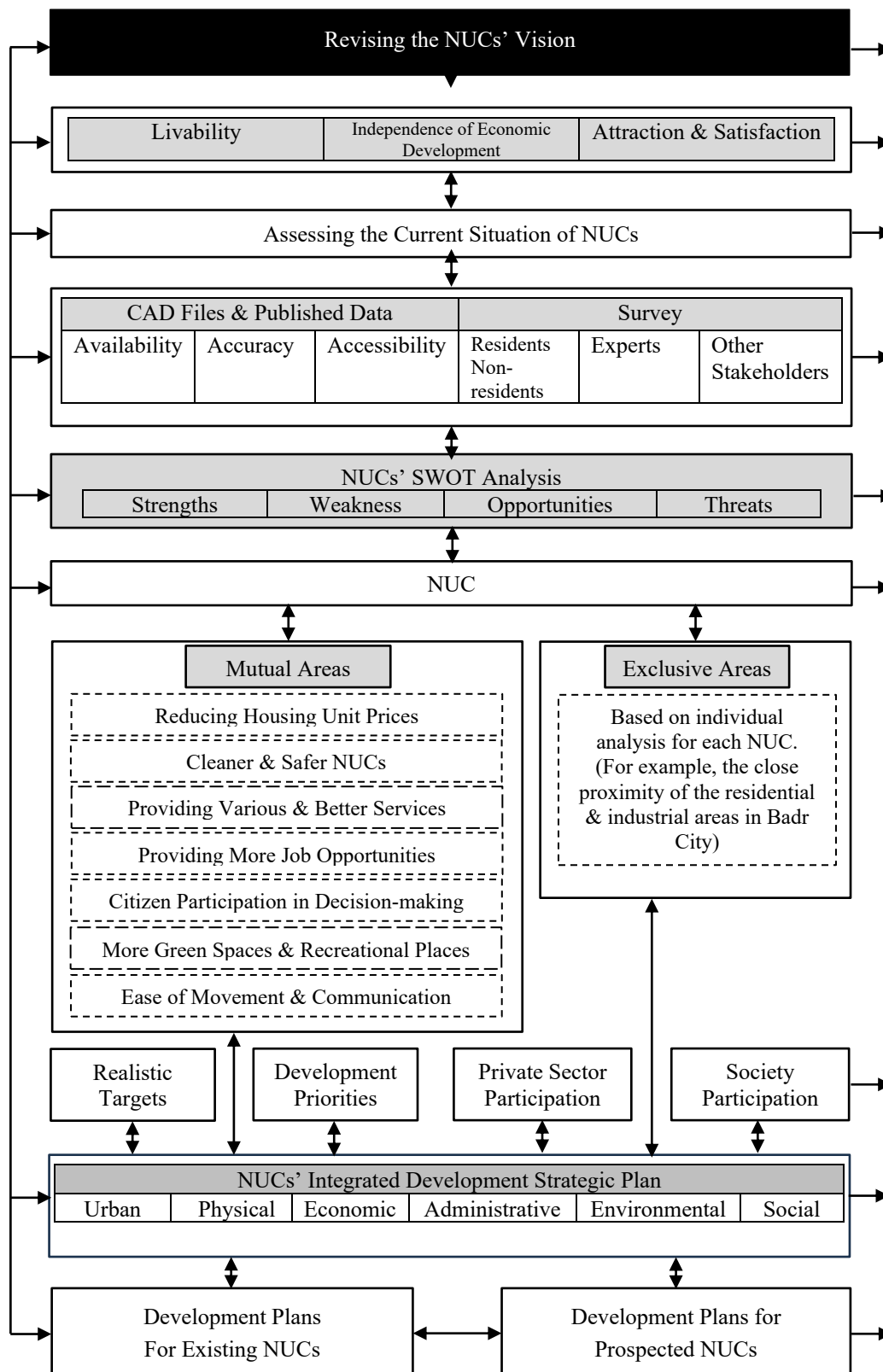


Figure 11. A Proposed Integrated Urban Development Strategy

Source: Developed by the authors.

5.2. Assessing the Current Situation of NUCs

The second phase of developing an integrated urban development strategy involves assessing the current situation of the NUCs. In this stage, it is crucial to evaluate the availability, accuracy, and

accessibility of various data sources, including CAD files, published reports, and surveys related to the NUCs.

The findings reveal that accurately assessing the achievements of the NUCs in meeting their target populations is challenging due to inconsistent published data. To address this, it's essential to create a comprehensive and updated database of Computer-Aided Design (CAD) files for all NUCs, as current files from institutions like the Egyptian General Surveying Authority (EGSA) and the NUCA are largely outdated, dating back to 2004. Furthermore, published data must be consistent and regularly updated. NUCA should review the data for all NUCs to resolve contradictions in reports regarding the number of inhabitants, vacant houses, and unoccupied land sold.

Furthermore, the current supply-driven urban strategies depend on top-down planning, frequently neglecting the needs and preferences of residents. In contrast, the proposed integrated regenerative urban strategy embraces a bottom-up approach, incorporating feedback from various stakeholders to enhance the development of NUCs. This strategy prioritizes gathering updated data through two surveys: the first targets residents and professionals to assess satisfaction and pinpoint areas for improvement. The second survey is conducted during the feasibility study of projected NUCs, aiming to understand the needs of future residents to ensure the community's attractiveness and suitability. These surveys bolster citizen participation initiatives, creating a comprehensive database for effective NUCs development in Egypt. Each City Development Authority (CDA) can administer the first survey. In contrast, NUCA will compile an integrated database and collaborate with the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development for the second survey.

5.3. Developing SWOT Analysis.

A SWOT analysis is a strategic planning technique that helps assess NUCs from four perspectives: Strengths (S), Weaknesses (W), Opportunities (O), and Threats (T). While strengths (and weaknesses) relate to internal factors that represent the advantages (and disadvantages) of NUCs, opportunities (and threats) focus on external factors that help (or hinder) them in achieving their goals. The primary goal of SWOT analysis is to increase awareness of the factors that should be considered when establishing a strategy. Thus, the third phase of generating an integrated urban development strategy involves the data from different sources presented in the preceding phase to compile a SWOT analysis for the Egyptian NUCs.

5.4. Determining NUCs' Areas of Development.

The fourth phase of developing an effective integrated urban development strategy involves examining the outcomes of the SWOT analysis conducted in the previous phase to identify potential areas for development in NUCs. These potential areas can be categorized into two groups: mutual (or standardized) development areas and exclusive (or unique) development areas. This classification aids in understanding the specific needs of each of the NUCs, prioritizing objectives, and allocating resources more effectively. Mutual or standardized development areas refer to factors shared among most NUCs that negatively impact residents' attraction and satisfaction. In contrast, exclusive or unique development areas consist of specific issues that affect only certain NUCs and are not present in all communities; these issues require urgent attention from their residents. For instance, Badr City has industrial activities that are close to residential areas. This layout can result in health problems, such as air and noise pollution. One proposed solution is to construct a green buffer zone to separate these activities, ensuring the health and safety of the citizens.

5.5. Deriving an Integrated Development Strategic Plan

The fifth phase of developing an integrated urban strategy focuses on creating a strategic plan for NUCs that addresses the needs of both current and potential residents while aligning with government capabilities. This plan should promote cohesive urban, economic, environmental, and social growth for existing and future NUCs. Its success depends on identifying areas for improvement and considering four key inputs: setting realistic targets, establishing development priorities, advocating for private sector partnerships, and promoting societal participation.

5.5.1. Setting Realistic Targets

This study identifies a key limitation affecting the success of NUCs in Egypt: their targets are often unrealistic. It is recommended that the NUCA consider the following when setting realistic targets and goals for their development plans:

- To determine the density of NUCs, NUCA can refer to a formal global standard source such as the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). According to UN-Habitat, the ideal population density for cities in lower-middle-income countries like Egypt is 7,200 people per square kilometer.
- To estimate the number of inhabitants in NUCs, NUCA can multiply the number of active electrical meters in each home by the average number of family members in Egypt, ranging from 4 to 5. Additionally, NUCA can enhance the accuracy of this estimate by calculating the average population for all months throughout the year, which helps minimize errors in the result.
- To decide the number of housing units required per NUC, the target population should be divided by the average number of family members, which in Egypt is typically between 4 and 5 members per household.
- To estimate the years required to reach the targets, NUCA can calculate the time by dividing the current population by the average yearly increase in citizens. The average annual increase in citizens represents the population growth rate over a specific period. According to the World Bank definition, this figure can be found by dividing the sum of the differences between the population at the beginning and end of each year by the number of years within that period. This method offers a consistent view of population changes instead of focusing on annual fluctuations, which may be influenced by anomalies.

5.5.2. Establishing Development Priorities.

Establishing development priorities is vital for creating an effective NUCs model tailored to Egypt's goals for population redistribution. This approach will benefit both current and future generations while minimizing resource waste. The NUCA should prioritize redevelopment based on three criteria: proximity to Cairo, annual migration rates, and community clustering.

The first criterion for selecting NUCs is their proximity to Cairo, with closer NUCs receiving higher priority for redevelopment. This strategy aims to alleviate pressure on Cairo and the Nile Valley. In contrast, NUCs that are farther away, such as New Luxor, will be lower on the priority list and require more time for improvement. The second criterion is the average annual migration to each of the NUCs. Average yearly migration is the average number of citizens who have migrated to the NUCs since their establishment, calculated by dividing the current population by the years since establishment. A higher average migration indicates a greater need for redevelopment, maximizing results with limited resources. The third criterion combines the age of the NUCs, the percentage of the target population achieved, and the proximity to Cairo. Cluster analysis can group these variables to enhance homogeneity within the groups and diversity between the groups.

5.5.3. Advocating Private Sector Partnership

The private sector is essential for developing mega projects and alleviating pressure on public resources. The NUCA should collaborate with the Ministry of Finance and other institutions to create incentives for private investment in NUCs, such as tax breaks and reduced land prices. Financial initiatives that offer low-interest loans can further stimulate this investment. Additionally, NUCA can explore Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) to enhance collaboration, utilizing models like Build, Operate, and Transfer (BOT), Build, Operate, Lease, and Transfer (BOLT), and Build, Operate, and Own (BOO). These partnerships can promote residential development while benefiting the private sector.

5.5.4. Promoting Society's Participation

Promoting society's participation in developing NUCs is essential, as stakeholders have varying priorities. Therefore, the City Development Authority (CDA) should establish a "Consulting

Residential Group" in each NUC to identify trends, challenges, and feedback that help the planning process. Supporting these initiatives helps create databases for NUCs at the NUCA level to develop a well-structured new Egyptian urban community model while also contributing to reducing resource waste and the annual budget spent on NUCs.

6. Conclusion and Future Research

Existing evidence shows that the Egyptian New Urban Communities (NUCs) are viewed as a feasible option for redistributing the population from the Greater Cairo Region (GCR) and the Nile Valley. However, the persistent high population density in the GCR and the low occupancy rates in the NUCs indicate that further studies are necessary to develop an integrated strategy for enhancing the NUCs. Based on the theory of polycentric urban governance, this research contends that fragmented governance systems in developing NUCs significantly affect their livability, economic independence, strategic practices, and overall effectiveness. Analyses of expert insights, published data, and maps reveal that NUCs have not yet been able to redistribute Egypt's population effectively. The findings showed that the NUCs have not successfully redistributed the population across Egypt, as evidenced by the low average occupancy rates in NUCs over various generations, moderate success in achieving their objectives, and the continued high population concentration in the GCR. Moreover, the overall livability of the NUCs is rated as low, with significant improvements needed in areas such as the cost of living, affordable housing, and public transportation. Regarding economic independence, NUCs are moderately independent, as many still depend heavily on nearby major cities. Additionally, NUCA's outdated strategic vision, lack of accurate data on NUCs, and unrealistic goals for NUCs have resulted in inadequately informed strategic decisions.

Therefore, the study proposed an integrated urban development strategy for NUCs. The interconnected components of this strategy include revising the vision and strategic priorities of the NUCs, assessing the current situation, creating updated databases and CAD files, completing a SWOT analysis, and classifying development areas. The next phase involves deriving a strategic development plan that addresses the needs of both existing and potential residents while aligning with the government's capabilities. However, the success of the integrated development strategy relies on setting realistic targets, defining development priorities, and engaging the private sector and community. Furthermore, the proposed strategy assumes that development is a multi-stage process that ensures flexibility and harmonizes urban, physical, economic, administrative, environmental, and social development for current and prospective NUCs. The findings of this research align with global evidence suggesting that new urban cities often prioritize real estate speculation over long-term livability and sustainable economic value.

Although this study sheds light on the dynamics of NUCs in Egypt, its findings are limited by the measurement of the variables used, the data from experts' opinions, and the available published data and maps, which may not adequately reflect the complexity of the NUCs in Egypt. Thus, future research is invited to address these limitations by extending this study to different contexts, utilizing a larger sample size, and incorporating feedback from various stakeholders of the NUCs. Additionally, future studies could build upon the proposed strategy in this study by conducting comparative case studies to deepen our understanding of urbanization complexity in a global context.

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Conflict of Interests

The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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Data availability statement

All the relevant data from this study are available from the corresponding author upon request.

CRediT author statement

Conceptualization: M.K.K., and H.R.H. Methodology: M.K.K., and H.R.H. Software: M.K.K. Validation: M.K.K., and H.R.H. Formal analysis: M.K.K. Writing-original draft preparation: M.K.K., and H.R.H. Writing-review and editing: M.K.K., and H.R.H. Visualization: M.K.K. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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